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The Tasks of the Navy
and the Methods of Performing Them

by

Admiral N. Kharlamov

The tasks of the Navy in a future war are a subject of theoretical as well as practical significance to the entire Armed Forces. There is still lacking the necessary unity of understanding among the command elements of the various types of Armed Forces regarding the role, place and significance of combat operations at sea, especially in the initial period of a war.

In the article by Admiral V. Platonov¹, the tasks which may be assigned to our navy in a future war have been examined in the main, correctly. However, these tasks are spelled out in general terms and are applicable to a war as a whole, with no consideration for the specific conditions of its initial period.

And yet, the nature of naval forces operations, the substance of the tasks being performed, the degree of their importance, and the sequence of their execution will differ greatly in the initial period of a war from the execution of these same tasks during subsequent periods of a war.

It is a universally recognized principle that the initial period of a war will have a decisive influence on the subsequent operations of each of the opposing sides. Obviously it is during this very period that both of the opponents will strive to use the greatest possible part of their nuclear/

1. Special Collection of Articles of the Journal
"Military Thought", Second Issue, 1961.

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missile power amassed during the many years of peace. Here, from the very beginning of the war, a fierce struggle will be carried on to ensure the opportunity to use to the full the most powerful means of destruction available, or, as we say, the struggle for the strategic initiative.

The main point of this struggle for our Armed Forces will be to frustrate the enemy attack, deny him the opportunity of carrying out previously developed plans for the initial operations, and from using means of mass destruction readied in advance, and, at the same time, to deliver such a powerful strike against the enemy that it would appreciably reduce his capability to conduct subsequent combat operations.

The decisive role in the delivery of such a strike will belong to the missile troops of strategic designation, which are capable of hitting at the most vital enemy strategic objectives located on any of the continents.

A significant part of the efforts of the Armed Forces will have to be expended for the destruction of such delivery vehicles of the enemy's nuclear/missile weapons as missile atomic submarines, carrier strike large units, and groupings of surface missile-carrying vessels, which are not only capable of delivering strikes at our coastal installations, but can also operate against interior areas of the country. The first strike against these forces of the enemy must also be delivered at the very beginning of the war, and must be calculated to take place before the enemy can fully use the capabilities available to him.

In contrast to the objectives of strikes by the missile troops which are stationary--thus permitting prior determination of all the necessary data and the creation of a grouping of forces for delivering

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a strike against them at any moment, naval targets have a very high degree of mobility. Therefore, for combat with enemy naval forces it will be necessary also to bring in mobile forces which have at their disposal the necessary nuclear/missile power. The only force actually capable of frustrating the first enemy strikes from the sea continues to be the Navy, and its basic task in the initial period of a war is to frustrate the nuclear/missile attack in the course of the enemy's so-called "all-out nuclear offensive" from the sea.

Just as the missile troops, by their first strikes against objectives on enemy territory, will destroy those of his means of carrying on a nuclear/missile war which are located on land, so the forces of the Navy will have to perform this task at sea.

This is why the basic and primary task of our Navy in the initial period of a war will be to destroy the forces of the enemy navy, which, along with other forces, comprise the basis of his nuclear/missile power. The first strikes of our fleet should be directed against such objectives as, above all, missile submarines, carrier strike large units, and groupings of missile-carrying vessels at sea or in bases.

The destruction of the strike forces of the enemy navy should be carried out within the framework of one or more initial operations. Operations against the enemy forces will have a single goal, and will be carried out simultaneously and according to a single plan. In connection with this, combat with aircraft carriers, missile submarines and groupings of surface vessels will be appropriate individual tasks of this overall operation. It will be carried out by specially constituted groupings of forces which will deliver strikes against enemy naval forces in the areas of basing, under way at

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sea, and directly in the areas of combat operations.

If the task of frustrating the enemy's nuclear offensive from the sea is successfully accomplished, it will have a direct and substantial influence not only on subsequent combat operations at sea, but on the course of combat operations along certain strategic axes. Therefore, in order to destroy the strike forces of the enemy navy at the very start of the war, it is necessary to allot sufficiently large forces, even to the detriment of the performance of other tasks, so that the first strike against the enemy is the most powerful. Only in this way can we be certain that the enemy will be incapable of parrying our strike, and that it will therefore be highly successful and bear important results.

Up to the present time, authors of many articles and scientific works, as well as the author of the article presently under discussion, maintain that such a naval task as disrupting enemy sea and ocean communication lines must also be accomplished in the initial period of a war. Moreover, Admiral V. Platonov writes that "combat with carrier strike large units on the ocean.....is only part of the task of disrupting the enemy ocean routes of communication, though it may be the most difficult part".

There is no need to argue the point that the destruction of the main strike groupings of enemy naval forces will facilitate the operations of our naval forces against the ocean communication lines of the enemy. The issue lies elsewhere--should combat against enemy communication lines be carried out simultaneously with the operations to destroy the main strike forces of the enemy navy; will it be justified to allot for this purpose a considerable portion of the forces to the detriment of the accomplishment of the main task of the initial period of the war---frustrating the enemy nuclear attack from the sea.

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There is no doubt that the disruption of ocean communication lines and interruption of enemy sea transport will have considerable bearing on the course of combat operations in all theaters, but the effect will not be felt immediately; it will become evident gradually, as the materiel prepared by the enemy in advance becomes expended and his armed forces begin to suffer seriously from lack of ammunition, fuel, materiel and personnel. It will take at least several months before such a situation is reached, i.e., after the first operations have already been completed.

Our probable opponents are amassing the required supplies of materiel in the theaters of military operations at a rate which, taking losses into account, will ensure the conduct of combat operations for a period of 3 to 4 months.

Due consideration must also be given to the fact that at the present time certain changes are taking place in the thinking of the probable opponent regarding the system of protecting his sea and ocean communication lines. Aware of the fact that ocean and sea ports will become targets for nuclear strikes in the initial period of a war, the NATO military command now considers that one of the priority tasks in the initial period of a war is the withdrawal of their merchant ships from the areas of nuclear strikes in order to preserve them for carrying out heavy shipments in the subsequent period of the war.

This task was executed in practice at the strategic command-staff exercise of the NATO Armed Forces, "Side Step", in 1960. During the exercise, within 48 hours after the beginning of military operations, almost all ocean-going vessels, with the exception of those in mothballs or undergoing repair, were withdrawn from major European ports and from the Atlantic coastline of the United States.

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Of 2242 vessels originally located in 68 major ports, 2002 were evacuated. Only 190 remained in European ports, and approximately 50 were left in U.S. ports. Those merchant ships which were at sea at the time were also directed to the western part of the Atlantic Ocean.

The ships were evacuated in convoys as well as individually. In all, 33 convoys were recorded in 5 days, each consisting of 10 to 45 transports; in this instance protection for the majority of the convoys consisted of 1 to 3 escort vessels. Six convoys proceeded with no protection whatever. During the same period records show that there was only one convoy departing the United States for Europe; it consisted of 13 vessels and was escorted by 6 war ships. The majority of the merchant vessels--approximately 66 percent-- were evacuated to ports of North, West and South Africa. The remaining vessels were directed to the area of the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea.

Such operations of the enemy corroborate once more that in the initial period of a war major movements of troops and freight from U.S. ports to the European Theater of War are not very likely.

Also, although the destruction of the transports while they are in process of evacuation will decrease the enemy's capabilities to organize subsequent sea shipments, it will have no direct influence on the course of combat operations in the naval and ground theaters in the initial period of a war.

If small convoys are detected delivering troops across the ocean to the European Theater of War, their destruction can be incidental to the accomplishment of the basic tasks.

Such is the situation regarding operations against enemy ocean communication lines in the initial

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period of a war.

We cannot rule out the possibility that in the first days of a war, our probable opponent may begin transporting troops by sea along coastal communication routes for the purpose of regrouping, reinforcement or evacuation of groupings pushed up against the sea, or for delivering materiel to them. Such operations are likely to take place in both the closed sea and ocean theaters of military operations. Such enemy sea transport will become the objective of operations of the inshore (blizhneye deystviye) naval forces, including missile-carrying surface vessels.

The main efforts of the Navy in the initial period of a war must be concentrated against the strike forces of the enemy navy. Atomic and missile submarines and missile-carrying aviation should be directed first of all at the destruction of those forces of the enemy navy which deliver nuclear/missile weapons. At the same time, and incidental to this, the task of disrupting enemy sea communication lines also will be accomplished in part. By destroying enemy naval bases and ports, the Navy will also destroy the transports and freight standing in them.

Although the task of disrupting sea communication lines and frustrating enemy sea transport is one of the main tasks of the Navy in the initial period of a war, it must be executed, in full scope, only after the nuclear/missile power of the enemy strike groupings has been undermined considerably, and his forces have lost the capability to deliver concentrated strikes against our Navy and its basing areas as well as against the rear area installations of our country.

In order to set up successful combat with enemy sea transport, prevent reinforcement of his ground

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troop groupings in the course of the first operations, cut off delivery of essential materiel, and frustrate the evacuation of valuable materiel from Europe to the other side of the ocean, it is necessary to take all possible measures for annihilating his carrier strike large units and destroying his missile submarines. This task must be executed by the fleet in coordination with the missile troops of strategic designation, and will make it possible, in a short time, to weaken enemy naval forces in the theater and will release our submarines and missile-carrying aviation for operation against enemy distant ocean communication lines.

At the time that large units of missile troops, while delivering strikes against vital objectives on enemy territory, including ports and naval bases, also are destroying the ships located therein, the navy will engage in combat with carrier strike large units, enemy missile submarines and their supporting forces directly at sea, destroy aircraft carriers, missile-carrying vessels and atomic submarines in the areas of their combat operations and on the approaches to them. Part of the naval forces will deliver strikes against the basing areas of the antisubmarine forces, airfields of antisubmarine defense (PLO) aviation, communications centers, control centers and the more important means of radiotechnical surveillance and navigation in the sea theater.

Regarding the actual methods of naval forces operations for destroying enemy carrier strike large units, in this matter we share the point of view of Admiral V. Kasatonov¹, and cannot accept as well founded the estimate of Admiral V. Platonov regarding the capabilities of our fleet in the

¹Special Collection of Articles of the Journal "Military Thought", Fifth Issue, 1961 /sic, probably Fourth Issue, 1961

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execution of this task, nor the evaluation of the exercises conducted to work out the methods of naval forces operation against enemy carrier strike large units.

Admiral V. Platonov writes as follows regarding one of the exercises of recent years: "It was artlessly and sketchily conceived, and carried out in a simplified manner". The actual case was somewhat different. This Pacific Fleet exercise was one of the first major exercises in which the operations of our forces were carried out at a great distance from their bases, that is, in those areas where enemy naval forces may be engaged in operations in a future war. The forces representing the simulated enemy carrier strike force (AUS) were deployed through the Korean Strait and proceeded to the east of Japan, to a distance of a few hundred miles. For operations against them, the submarine forces of the Pacific Fleet were deployed southeast of the island of Hokkaido. Aviation from the area of Sovetskaya Gavan delivered strikes against war ships at sea. Thus, in this exercise, simulation of the operations of forces was brought to a minimum.

During the exercise, only one version of the operations was played, and the most difficult one at that--when the carrier strike large unit is deployed within the operational area of aviation from remote bases, located in the Hawaiian Islands. In this version our navy will have less time for organizing a strike. Organization of reconnaissance and target designation will be particularly difficult in such a case.

If, however, the strike carriers are relocated (deployed) to bases in Japan, prior to the initiation of combat operations, and their aviation takes off directly from the bases for the strike, as Admiral V. Platonov writes, then the task of annihilating the carrier strike force can be achieved in the

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overall plan for destroying coastal objectives, and will be considerably easier than under conditions of carrier strike force operations in remote regions of the ocean.

It is obvious that in the course of operational training, different versions of naval forces operations may be worked out. As is generally known, during the Pacific Fleet exercise the concept and plan of naval operations envisaged action against objectives located on the mainland and on enemy island bases, as well as strikes against carrier strike forces on the ocean. For this purpose it was planned to use aviation, shore missile units and a unit of submarines. However, for obvious reasons, strikes against the bases and against objectives of the probable enemy located on shore could not be worked out in practice.

Admiral V. Platonov is in favor of eradicating simplification and sketchiness in the operations of the naval forces while they are working out methods of executing combat missions on the ocean in the process of naval training. Such a requirement is obligatory, and in order to fulfill it, much effort is needed on the part of the teachers and the pupils in all exercises conducted in the Navy.

However, it must be mentioned here that a tremendous gulf sometimes exists between requirements and capabilities of fulfilling them, and the fight against simplification in combat training can be carried on up to specific, sane limits, which, under present conditions, it is impossible to exceed.

Before, when the main weapon of a war ship was artillery, and that of aviation--torpedoes and conventional bombs, delivery of strikes against groupings of ships could be simulated by the actual use of the weapons against special targets, or even against combat vessels. True, even then full use could not be made of all the means of defense and protection of a ship repelling the strikes of

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"the enemy". Therefore, even at that time, concentrated strikes, combined attacks and single round firings on ships appeared far from what it would be in an actual combat situation.

Now, when missiles and torpedoes with nuclear charges are becoming the main weapons of war ships and aircraft, carrying out even a small number of experiments with the actual use of weapons is far from being always possible, and it is questionable whether the results attained would justify the use. The cost of the weapons, measures for ensuring security, the great expenditure of forces which would be allotted for this purpose, and other circumstances would require an even greater amount of simulation in the operations of the naval forces during combat training than is permitted at the present time without the actual use of weapons.

Nevertheless, even now, as more and more missiles of various designation are being used for naval armament, it is becoming difficult to find a naval exercise in which there is no actual use of missiles by submarines, aviation and surface vessels. It is true that, for obvious reasons, missile launchings at present are carried out at firing ranges, and not against vessels and aircraft participating in an exercise. From this point of view, some of our exercises are simulated to a certain degree, and the operations of naval forces in these exercises are conducted in oversimplified conditions, different by far from those in which even the first combat of a future war will be conducted. This is done because we still have not created perfected targets and means of simulating missiles which would permit us to work out their launchings effectively; thus, out of necessity, we have to use missiles only on special firing ranges, and not directly during the playing of tactical phases--the attacks and strikes of mixed forces.

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And although atomic and hydrogen bombs are not exploded at the exercises, and the piercing whistle of cruise missiles is not heard over the war ships, everything else--from the deployment of forces and the organization of strikes up to going into the attack using training torpedoes and various means of simulation--is carried out just as it will be under combat conditions. Therefore we cannot agree with the assertion that oversimplification in combat training and in the organization and conduct of exercises, and stereotyped use of forces, are prevalent in the Navy. As is generally known, our Navy broke away from the shore just a few years ago, and the main areas of its combat training became those seas and ocean regions which would most likely be used by the naval forces of the enemy in a future war. These areas are quite distant from our bases, airfields and coastline, and this fact in itself brings the conditions under which our naval forces will operate nearer to actual wartime conditions. In these areas submarines and missile-carrying aviation develop and check out in practice the most effective methods of operations and the use of their weapons in a complex situation.

At the exercises, in accordance with the particular situation, submarines are deployed in appropriate groupings in the most probable areas of operations of enemy carrier strike large units. In order to simulate the operations of the "enemy", war ships usually go out to sea and carry out operations in accordance with the views of the military leadership of the NATO countries which are known to us.

In exercises of recent years, the first strikes against the "enemy" war ship groupings were delivered by those forces which were the first to arrive in the area of "enemy" operations--in accordance with the principle "no one waits for anyone". In a number of instances the first to use their weapons

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were the large units of missile-carrying aviation. There were also cases when the first strikes against the "enemy" were delivered by submarines. Later the naval command usually strived to direct as many submarines as possible at the "enemy". Repeated strikes by aircraft completed the annihilation of his war ship groupings.

One of the shortcomings of exercises is that the simulated forces are not fully used in them. Their function is limited to that of simulating the enemy up to the time that submarines and aviation deliver a series of nuclear strikes against him. As soon as the naval forces execute the task of annihilating the enemy strike groupings the simulating forces return to base.

In a majority of the exercises conducted, not all of the submarines had time to attack "the enemy", and often began to return to base, on signal, without having made even one attack. Thus, although the exercises were instructive for the Navy on the whole, and permitted it not only to check out, but to perfect, the methods of operations of submarines and aviation, for those submarines which did not succeed in attacking "the enemy", the prolonged stay at sea, in essence, represented a routine, and not a combat, cruise.

We consider that all submarines proceeding to remote areas should have a chance to conduct at least a few attacks on the "enemy" in the ocean. This can be ensured comparatively simply. After the main tasks of the naval exercise are carried out, it is advisable to conduct the simulated forces, deliberately, through those areas where, toward the end of the exercise, our submarines are located. This will create the necessary conditions for working out the operations of submarines in remote areas of the ocean, and will provide opportunity to carry out a series of attacks under realistic conditions. The latter is necessary for the moral satisfaction of the

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submarine personnel, whose intense training during a cruise should be concluded by an attack, as it will under combat conditions.

The simulation forces should be used to the utmost in working out such matters as combat use of naval shore missile units, missile and torpedo patrol boats (kater) and various means of combat, in order that each naval exercise would actually be Navy-wide, and all the large units and units would have a real opportunity to conduct attacks against the enemy, thus bringing to a logical conclusion the long period of maintaining them at combat readiness.

One cannot but express amazement at the assertion of Admiral V. Platonov that "control of naval forces is presently undergoing a crisis" and at his proposal to unravel some "knot of contradictions".

Does everything regarding the control of the naval forces actually seem to be as it is pictured in Admiral V. Platonov's article? We are very far from accepting these extreme opinions and pointed conclusions as being fair.

If the logic of Admiral V. Platonov's reasoning is followed, when he suggests that there be two commanders of the naval forces--each independent of the other--the question automatically arises--why only two? If our Navy is carrying out an operation for the destruction of enemy naval forces, the forces of the former will be conducting operations along several axes, executing independent tasks. Part of the forces will carry on combat with carrier strike large units, another part will hunt out atomic submarines and destroy them, and part will perform tasks for the destruction of ports and naval bases, and for putting out of commission the ships and vessels located therein. To this we must add that in order to support the operations of their groupings of

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strike forces, and also for the defense of the system of basing and for the execution of the greatest number of tasks by way of systematic combat operations, special forces will be needed which, at the present time, are the forces of naval bases and divisions (brigades) of the inshore defense (OVR - okhrana vodnykh rayonov). All these groupings will operate in different areas of the theater, their methods and duration of operations will vary, and the groupings will differ from each other in the composition of forces.

In other words, it turns out that for each grouping of forces engaged in executing one of the tasks of the operation, it will be necessary to have a commander of forces, who will be, in the opinion of Admiral V. Platonov, one of the independent commanders of the fleet. But since all these forces will execute their tasks in coordination, and organizationally are united into one Navy, it will be necessary to have still another naval commander over all the other commanders. Such an "improvement", in our opinion, would not lead to better control of the naval forces, but would indeed give rise to a crisis.

It is necessary to search for ways of improving the system of control of forces, not by increasing the number of commanders of each fleet, but in wide-scale automation of all the work of the command and staffs. At present this is the most correct and promising path, which, if followed, will open up great possibilities for ensuring dependable, uninterrupted and flexible control of all naval forces, operating in different areas of the theater and executing various tasks. And when the electronic-computing equipment takes its proper place in the work of our headquarters, it will fully assure the capability of a single commander to control all the forces while they are operating in any ocean areas.

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The dismal picture painted by the author of the resubordination of part of the forces of one fleet to another while both are executing the same task, is far from the actual true situation.

Actually, when two fleets jointly fulfill the same task, we work out the transfer of part of the forces of one fleet to the subordination of another. This means that the attached or supporting forces are being used together with the basic forces of the fleet, which were allotted for the execution of a single task. They are under the direction of one of the fleet commanders designated by the Commander-in-Chief of the Navy.

Experience gained in exercises has indicated that such use of the forces of two or more fleets for the execution of the same task fully justifies itself, and none of the awful situations with which the author attempts to frighten us has developed. And anyway, under present conditions, the development of such situations is impossible. The forces of one fleet are attached to another, not for operating in a specific area, limited by one of the parallels, but for the performance of a definite task. And only after this task is executed---regardless of whether it is below or above the 50° parallel, the attached forces can be redirected and consequently become resubordinated to the other commander.

Such resubordination is nothing to shy away from, but it should be worked out and mastered in the process of combat training, because this is one of the possible workable means of concentrating the efforts of two or more fleets for the execution of important tasks in short periods of time.

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Equally unfounded are the author's misgivings that the war ships operating near the boundary lines will not know to whom to report and whose orders to follow. This will not happen if the tasks are clearly assigned. We cannot seriously consider that the commanders of submarines being deployed several thousand of miles away from their bases will not know why they were sent there. Neither will they be required to report to various addresses regarding their operations, because we have adopted and operate on a unified system of communications for all fleets. And finally, we must bear in mind that the boundary lines between the zones of operations of adjacent fleets are fixed by the high command, which, in assigning a task to the fleets, defines the areas of their operations, and at any given moment, just as soon as needed, can shift the boundary line as required by the actual situation.

In a number of instances Admiral V. Platonov overestimates the capabilities of the probable opponent. He writes that if "... the situation forces the enemy to sally forth into open sea to deliver a strike, then the carrier strike large unit will see to it that a thorough preliminary search is carried out and that the area of its maneuvering is cleared of enemy submarines". We can hardly agree that the enemy will be able to destroy our forces completely in one or another area even before the accomplishment of the combat task. However, if the author of the article thinks otherwise, then he should not only have described this situation, but also offered some way out of it.

We are of the opinion that our forces are capable of operating in remote areas of the ocean and successfully accomplishing the task of destroying carrier strike large units.

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Also incorrect is the assertion of the author of the article that we still have not determined the main forces for the task of combat with missile submarines.

It is known that already in 1957, in connection with the accelerated construction by the United States of atomic submarines, armed with "Polaris" missiles, and the possibility of their being used from the ice areas of the Arctic, the Navy was assigned a new task--to prevent these submarines from delivering strikes against our territory. Special measures were taken for the most rapid construction of special antisubmarine defense (PLO) forces, as well as for working out the use for this purpose of the forces and means which were already part of the equipment of the fleet.

The fleets and academies were assigned the task of giving special attention during operational and combat training, and while conducting scientific research, to finding effective methods of combat with missile submarines. As a result of this, at the present time a system of antisubmarine defense has been worked out, as well as opinions regarding the performance of its tasks.

It is felt that combat with missile submarines is to be carried out with equal intensity in both close and remote areas. It will consist of strikes against missile submarine bases, the mining of their basing points, and destroying them in remote areas, prior to their approach to firing positions.

Admiral V. Platonov correctly affirms that the main force of the Navy in combat with missile submarines will be antisubmarine submarines. However, absolute denial of the capabilities of aviation and surface vessels in this combat must be considered incorrect. In the next few years surface

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vessels and PLO aviation will comprise the basis for combat with missile submarines in coastal areas. These forces will also have a definite role in remote areas.

In Admiral V. Platonov's article we come across other incorrect propositions. We fully agree with the criticism of them expressed in the article by Admiral V. Kasatonov.

The editors of the periodical "Military Thought" acted correctly in organizing a discussion of the most important issues of the development and use of the Navy in a future war. A broad exchange of opinions by the command personnel of the Navy and other types of Armed Forces on the issues touched upon will permit us to understand more deeply the significance and substance of the changes taking place in our Navy, caused by the adoption into its armament of nuclear/missile weapons and various combat means based on radio-electronics, and to work out unity of views on all the basic issues of the development and use of naval forces.